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Review Of "The Monstered Self: Narratives Of Death And Performance In Latin American Fiction" By E. González

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a question raised by Gibbs herself earlier in her book when she doubts the existence of an archetype in the *Sonatas* as she partially quotes Seco Serrano and Maravall: "Qué tipo de 'ideal arquetípico' o 'paraíso alejado' pudiéramos imaginar al leer las cuatro *Sonatas*" (17). In view of her conclusions on Valle's critical stance on the bourgeois, the answer is simple: the archetype in the *Sonatas* resides in Bradomín. Even though on the surface he is an extraordinary character, in reality he is extremely deficient. In other words, what Bradomín epitomizes is not the positive in a given society, but rather he is a symbol of what is wrong with the bourgeois class when it misinterprets what the nobility should really be like.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4, ever so briefly, concern themselves, one way or another, with the rhetorical discourse—the official discourse—of the oligarchy at the end of the 19th century, the "Don Juan" like characteristics and the role of Bradomín as narrator of his memoirs when he portrays—or imagines—himself as a satanic figure, and the thematic and strategic importance of sexual discourse in the *Sonatas*. Gibbs's views in these chapters intelligently summarize what critics have said about the *Sonatas* and often shed new light on Valle's best-known novels. In dealing with Bradomín as a narrator and the role of the readers, however, it is clear that Gibbs would have achieved greater success and precision if she had availed herself of Narratology.

The volume's concluding chapter summarizes its findings. Among them, that even though the *Sonatas* are not directly referential with regard to a specific period in Spanish history, they do concern Spanish society early in the 20th century. All of this is expressed by Don Ramón as he subverts aspects of his modernist discourse, as he parodies certain stereotypes. All in all, the final chapter reiterates Gibbs's many contributions to the better understanding of the *Sonatas*, interpretations well-grounded in Spanish history.

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González, Eduardo. *The Monstered Self: Narratives of Death and Performance in Latin American Fiction.* Durham & London: Duke UP, 1992. 275 pp.

This is a challenging book for any reader but well worth the journey that González takes us on as he explores important literary texts from both an ethnographic and psychoanalytic perspective. Written in an extremely elliptical style, these essays examine the relationship between death and transfiguration and reflect a firm belief that the notion of character entails a complex union between recognition and transformation. Death and change thus become an inseparable pair and constitute the nature of performance in the texts studied.

At the same time, an element of monstrosity pervades all of the stories and novels examined. For González the monstrous finds its reflection in the image of authorial selfhood, whose masks of distortion and disfigurement embody the literary author's unending struggle against oblivion through the creation of myth. This question of monstrous metamorphosis involves for the author the concept of performance and a kind of ethical questioning on the role of choice in human behavior. In this respect, González examines two types of narrative plots: one that undermines a character's moral choice and another that allows the right to choose but ultimately subjects the character to the ritual bondage of a group.

The first part of the book ("Myth As Mask") takes up how the pantextual nature of Borges's fiction underscores the "local" and "personal" making of the human presence. González contends that Richard Poirier's (*The Performing Self*) distinction between "radical impulse" and "conservative necessity" seems to have fused in recent years into a dynamic of person-bond tendencies, investing the notions of character and personality with ever-growing credibility. In pursuing this belief, he looks at early Borges plots, together with texts by Walter Benjamin, H. G. Wells, Vargas Llosa, as well as Borges's own pantheistic image of Walt Whitman.

This initial section of the study embraces themes that will echo throughout the rest of the book. In starting with texts from Benjamin and Borges, González shows how the storyteller functions as a privileged mediator between stories of narrative and the theory of narrative or between allusion and biographic desire. Benjamin's and Borges's protagonists are seen as trapped between the desire to attain personal aesthetic honor and their perception of social conflict through their fascination with ritual and the power of the dead. In both writers each imaginary storyteller creates a space in which the author perceives a conflict between the individual and group solidarity. The end result is a blurring of the conventional lines that separate essay from story and for González the essayist becomes a character in his own analytic fictions. In his commentary on Vargas Llosa's *El hablador* González compares the life of the Peruvian author's storyteller with Aesop's raconteur in *Aesopica.*

The second part of the book ("Pastoral and Dark Romance") reexamines two persistent themes: the dangers of storytelling as individual (self) creation and the ritualistic nature of storytelling when viewed in its association with sacrifice and suicide. González examines 1) how Julio Cortazar's "Cefalea" embodies a plot based on unpredictable shifts of pronoun identity in which individuals who exist in pronoun form come into conflict with beings situated outside the order of grammar, and 2) how "Silvia," "Los venenos" and "Final del juego" represent typical cortazarian modes of the fantastic set within traditional pastoral conventions that are evoked and obliterated. The remain-

ing pages of this section offer an illuminating analysis of "Bestiario" in which this process of pastoral progression becomes an incestuous attack against primal innocence and of "Las armas secretas" in which an obsession with fantasy culminates in an aesthetic of suicide.

Part Three ("The Confessional Self") is a fascinating biographic reading of Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el Supremo.* González begins by tracing the figure of the divided son from Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* through the rituals of parthenogenesis and through the voices of Paraguay's native myths and chronicles. Myth plays a very complex role for González in Roa Bastos's novel. Its function is viewed first on a performative level as voice (the semantic, melodic impact of Guaraní upon Spanish) and gesture (the actions of characters which suggest a process of ritual ceremony). And finally it is also treated in the context of a performing space that dwells within individual consciousness.

Throughout his commentary González shows convincingly how the characters in all of these texts either enter a labyrinthine space peopled by tribal ancestors or abandon such space in search of a remote realm that imagined ancestors may still inhabit. Whatever the personal choice involved here, the character, according to González, moves from a class mediated social order into a primitive one based on notions of kinship, ritual and solidarity.

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Mandrell, James. *Don Juan and the Point of Honor: Seduction, Patriarchal Society, and Literary Traditions.* University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992.

This is an engaging, innovative and rich piece of criticism, a mirror in whose reflection we behold not only Don Juan but ourselves, those seduced by the Don Juan phenomenon. Producers and consumers of the *burlador's* ways are presented as accomplices in, not merely spectators of, the social and cultural structures he incarnates. Mandrell presents Don Juan as a voice of the self-preserving force of the western patriarchy that, although transforming itself across time, never abandons its objective of dominance.

The first chapter, "Meaning and the Critical Myth of Don Juan," is an exchange with critics, notably Maurice Molho, in which Mandrell indicates how use of the term "myth" in reference to Don Juan mistakenly implies that there is something eternally representative of human nature in this character, thereby endowing him with dimensions that supersede those of a legend or a theme. He proposes that Don Juan, meaning the character as well as what people have made of him, is more rightly called a mythology. Chapter one